

**Over-wintering aggregations of the Orange Ladybird *Halyzia sedecimguttata* (L.) (Col.: Coccinellidae) on trees in the garden at Buckingham Palace**

Just before Christmas 1999, staff in the garden at Buckingham Palace, London became aware of unusual concentrations of an unfamiliar ladybird on several trees within the boundary walls. These were brought to the attention of ML who made extensive notes on the phenomenon. Several examples were sent by him to CWP whereupon they were identified as *Halyzia 16-guttata* – the Orange Ladybird.

The ladybirds were gathered on six trees occupying an area of approximately 12 x 15 metres measured at trunk level. On three of these – a *Fagus sylvatica* “*Dawyk*”, a *Sorbus commixta* and a *Crataegus x mordensis* “*toba*”, the insects were distributed as singles or in pairs and widely scattered. Several examples of the Pine Ladybird *Exochomus quadripustulatus* (L.) were also found in association with these *Halyzia*. On a *Celtis pumila* tree, only six examples were found, but the remaining two trees in the group had much larger numbers. An *Ostrya carpinifolia* supported over a hundred Orange Ladybirds, scattered in ones, twos and groups of up to twelve over the whole tree, but mainly on the undersides of branch/stem axils. The final tree, a *Fagus sylvatica* “*rotundifolia*” had over 300 Orange Ladybirds scattered in groups all over the tree, from a few millimetres above the ground all the way up into the crown, and positioned towards all points of the compass. The insects were still on the trees on 9 February 2000, though they were not in a fixed place and occasionally moved around.

A tube of Orange Ladybirds passed by ML to CWP contained 98 examples. Although the release of live insects away from the area where they were captured is generally to be severely frowned upon, the mass murder of 98 ladybirds was not regarded as an option! Six vouchers specimens were retained and then, because the overnight temperature in CWP’s garden was dipping to -5°C at the time, the remainder were placed, in the tube, inside a fridge at 4°C for a few days. As soon as the weather had improved, the cap was removed from the tube and the tube rested horizontally amongst the ivy growing up the wall by the back door. Daily examination showed that, apart from two examples that were evidently dead, the ladybirds remained as a loose group, moving around within a radius of about 0.25 metres of the tube, whilst overnight minimum temperature stayed at or below 1°C. As the temperature rose above this in February, to an overnight minimum of 2°C or above, the ladybirds started to disperse over a wider area. On the 8 February 2000, after an overnight minimum of 5°C, none could be found on the ivy and the insects are presumed to have dispersed during the day, which rose to a sweltering 13°C! All temperatures recorded here are shade temperatures.

The Orange Ladybird was considered a relatively scarce insect, though it appears to have become more numerous the last three or four years, if the records are anything to go by, and is now certainly well-represented in London. It has a known association with sycamore trees *Acer pseudoplatanus*, although it is frequently found on other trees (particularly smooth bark trees), during the winter (Majerus and Williams, 1989. The distribution and life-history of the orange ladybird (*Halyzia 16-guttata* L.) (Coleoptera: Coccinellidae) in Britain. *Ent. Gaz.*, **40**. 71-78; Majerus,

1994. *Ladybirds*. New Naturalist's Series, HarperCollins, p. 93). There are several sycamores in the vicinity. Unlike most other British ladybirds, it feeds on various mildews on the leaves.

We are most grateful to the gardening staff at Buckingham Palace for noting the ladybird aggregations and drawing them to our attention, as well as for ensuring that the aggregations were not disturbed during the course of various winter gardening works taking place. We are also indebted to Dr Mike Majerus for his most helpful comments on an earlier draft of this short note and we have incorporated all of his comments where the information was available.— MARK LANE, Buckingham Palace, London SW1A 1AA and COLIN W. PLANT, 14 West Road, Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 3QP (E-mail: Colinwplant@compuserve.com).

### A January Spruce Carpet *Thera britannica* (Turner) (Lep.: Geometridae)

On the morning of 19 January 2000, I arrived at Highgate Wood, Middlesex (grid reference TQ 283887) to inspect the first catch of the new millennium in the moth-trap which I have run there every year, if on a somewhat irregular basis, since 1984. The disappointment of finding only one specimen soon deteriorated to self-doubt at finding nothing comparable to it in the pages of *Skinner* except a Spruce Carpet *Thera britannica*.

Since the text-books assured me that this species flies in May-June and August-September, and the larva fed up on spruces and firs in the autumn, hibernated when small, and fed up the following spring, I apologetically sent it to Colin Plant, who both reassured and surprised me, and himself, by confirming that it was, indeed, *britannica*. However, when I was reminded by Dennis Fletcher, of the Wood staff, that the Wood had, for several years, run a popular Christmas-tree recycling facility, the inexplicable suddenly became possible.

Picture a young *britannica* larva, quietly feeding on a spruce in some Christmas tree plantation, and by November or early December in hibernation. The tree is felled, and transported through various stages to a warm Yuletide household in the Highgate area. The larva naturally mistakes the central heating for the advent of spring, resumes feeding and pupates in mid to late December. Around 6 January, conscientious householders take the tree, with its unseen resident, to Highgate Wood, where it will be destined for the shredding machine.

Fortunately for this particular *britannica*, the mild weather, together with its advanced state of pupation, fortuitously mean that the adult hatches out in the depot, near where a moth trap will shortly be set, before it can be turned into compost – and the rest, as the media assure us, is history. Alas, the origin of the tree will never be known; can I count it as a Highgate Wood record?— MICHAEL HAMMERSON, 4 Bramalea Close, Highgate, London N6 4QD.